

THE HOME AND SOCIAL LIFE OF ALEXANDRIA

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Alexandria is a city of homes. "Moving Day" is practically unknown, and a loaded furniture van in the street is an object of curiosity.

Many of its oldest residents have spent their entire lives under the same roof-tree. In this way tradition and memory have maintained a strong hold upon the life of the present generation.

The plat of Alexandria was surveyed by Gen. Washington, and the buildings follow the plan of English towns of that date. The homes, mostly brick, are built opening directly on the sidewalk. The large porches and grounds are almost always to the side or rear and often hidden from view by forbidding brick walls. This was to give the privacy so dear to an Englishman's heart. But the present generation has outgrown this feeling, and the front steps, and even the sidewalks, during the summer season are commonly used as a gathering place for the belles and beaux.

Many of its residences date from the colonial period, are associated with historical events, and have sheltered from time to time most of the distinguished personages who had a part in making the history of the country. The house furnishings are in keeping with that period. Rare old furniture, silver, and paintings are common.

No financial stress would be sufficient to make the owners part with them, and they are jealously guarded, to be passed on to generations yet unborn.

Because of the home atmosphere and the quiet, dignified conservatism of its social life and its excellent educational advantages, Alexandria is an ideal place to rear children. For this reason many persons have bought homes here in recent years, as the rapid growth of its beautiful and modern suburbs attest.

Although Alexandria cannot claim to practice the typical Southern hospitality so famous in the literature of the South, its social life is generous and varied.

The churches and their activities, as in most small places, are important factors. It is particularly so in a locality where people inherit their brand of religious thought as they do their politics. Families have sat in the same church pews for a century, and a change of denomination is almost unknown.

The churches are well attended, and the parade out Washington street after the Sunday morning services is as dear to the true Alexandrian as the Fifth avenue Sunday morning promenade is to the New Yorker.

Although the social life of Alexandria centers around the home, a number of social organizations add variety and interest. Among the younger set the German Club in winter and the Boat Club in summer are important factors. The German Club during the season gives a number of entertainments, which are attended by distinguished visitors from many near-by cities. The Potomac Boat Club has a well equipped building with a fleet of pleasure craft. Its broad piazzas are a favorite resort in the summer evenings for those who do not care to participate in the more strenuous pleasures of boating or sailing.

Alexandria is noted for the number of pretty girls which year after year fill the ranks of its debutantes. Because of the number of these who marry into the different branches of the service, it is fast becoming the headquarters for "army and navy widows," who spend here among their girlhood associations the time their husbands are on cruises or foreign service.

A distinguishing feature, and one which has added zest to the life of the debutantes for many seasons, is the coterie of bachelors, many of them men who hold positions of importance in the State, and who are eligible parties, but seem to be satisfied with sipping the sweets from many flowers rather than bear matrimonial responsibilities.



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But the social life here does not consist solely of the lighter vein.

The proximity of the Theological Seminary and Episcopal High School, with their corps of cultivated professors and their families, gives a decided college flavor to the social life.

"The Hill," as it is affectionately called by the residents, has long been noted for its characteristic semi-cloisteral culture. The homes of the professors and a number of other well-known families who have sought its congenial atmosphere cluster around a group of college buildings situated in a superb grove of primeval trees. Here, from time to time, are delivered lectures by well-known authorities from every part of the world. Many distinguished men are among its alumni. The followers of Phillips Brooks, Bishop Potter, Dr. Sparrow, and others love to visit the scenes which have been made sacred to them because of their associations with these giants of intellect. The students also give a decidedly interesting touch, and the white tie and black coat of the theologian vie with the brass buttons of the army and navy in capturing some of our fairest daughters.

While Alexandria is noted for its conservatism, it is a congenial atmosphere for women's clubs. The Camera Club is an organization of which the city is justly proud. It is a woman's club, and has a large and representative membership, and its departments are well organized, covering the usual activities, and its year book will compare favorably with that of the clubs of larger cities. The civic department is especially active and has done much to cultivate the spirit of civic improvement, especially among the school children. Its educational department has done much toward the building and beautifying of the girls' school building. The patriotic societies of the D. A. R. and the Colonial Dames are very flourishing. Not only are the meetings interesting, with well prepared programmes on historical and educational subjects, but they have done a great

deal of work in preserving and marking historical spots. The handsome tablet to the pallbearers of Gen. Washington, recently placed in Christ Church vestibule, is an evidence of their activity, while old Pohick Church owns its rehabilitation largely to their efforts.

The gala day of Alexandria is February 22. If one wants to see the old town socially at its best, they should visit it at that time. Usually a very creditable parade is given. "Old Friendship" fire engine is wreathed with flowers, and is surrounded by an admiring throng, who love to recall the characteristic incident which is recorded of how upon one occasion, while Gen. Washington was walking down King street, the fire bells rang. The engine, drawn by half dozen lads, was almost stalled in the mud. Gen. Washington turned toward a group of friends standing near and said: "Gentlemen, I think it's time for us to take a hand." As he spoke the words, he hurried into the street and caught hold of the ropes, and soon the old engine was on its way to the fire, drawn by the "Father of His Country," assisted by every man of the town who could find any place to catch hold. Such was the magic in that touch that from that time on Alexandria's fire company became the most aristocratic organization in the community, and even to this day "Old Friendship" is the most honored guest at all the big fire company parades in the United States.

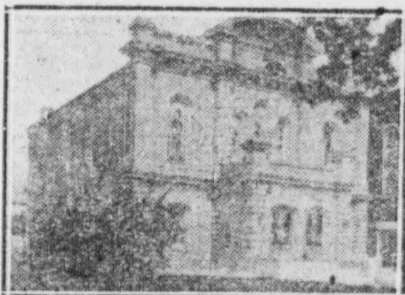
Most of the prominent citizens keep open house on February 22, and buffet luncheons are served throughout the day to all callers. Everybody spends the day upon the streets, greeting the visitors. Indeed, the 22d takes the place of the New Year reception of other cities.

The Daughters of Confederacy form another prominent organization. Largely due to their activities the building devoted to the use of old "vets" is made attractive and comfortable. This is a large, old-fashioned house, with delightful sitting and reading rooms and large assembly halls, where reunions and interesting and touching services are held commemorating the "Lost Cause." This is the only man's club in Alexandria with the exception of the Bachelor Club, which is a small organization, composed mainly of young men.

The recently completed Elks' Hall promises to be a great addition to the social life. Already they are planning for a ladies' day each week. The splendid auditorium and assembly hall will give to Alexandria that which it has long needed—an attractive place in which to hold its public functions.

The most characteristic feature of the domestic and social life of Alexandria is its freedom from commercialism. Money plays but a small part in any of its phases. There is not a millionaire in the city, and the families that are above the average in point of wealth, instead of being the social leaders, as is usually the case, are but little in evidence. Most families have either inherited or amassed modest incomes, and their social position is so assured that they do not feel the need of bidding for social favors by extreme display. Indeed, it is delightful to feel that in this commercial age there are, somewhere, people in moderate circumstances, and even those who need to add to their income by labor find that it is no disadvantage to them from a social standpoint. Some of the leading belles of Alexandria have sometimes been obliged to take commercial positions, but instead of debaring them from any of the social pleasures, they have been more eagerly sought because of the fact that they have shown their character in being able to rise above circumstances.

Here, I believe, are cherished some of the best traditions which have made our American society unique but healthy—nurturing the gifts and graces and the qualities of heart and head which stand for all that is best in our national life.



YOUNG PEOPLE'S BUILDING.